

# Innovative Thinking in Translation Studies: The Paradigm of Bassnett's and Lefevere's 'Cultural Turn'

Baicheng Zhang

School of Foreign Languages, Wuhan Polytechnic University, Wuhan, China

**Abstract**—Nowadays, there is an increasing number of scholars who conduct their translation studies from a cultural perspective, or at least, they are paying more attention to the factors relevant to culture in their theoretical researches and translation practices. Such a trend in the field of translation studies might be called as 'cultural turn', which dates back to the 1990s when Bassnett and Lefevere officially suggested that translation studies should take the 'cultural turn' (Bassnett & Lefevere, 2001, p.xi). In this paper, the author introduces Bassnett's and Lefevere's innovative thinking in translation studies, that is, the study of translation is essentially the study of cultural interaction. According to them, translation may be viewed as rewriting or manipulation. Based on their enlightening ideas and the previous studies, the author of this paper then generalizes a theoretical framework which can be used to conduct translation studies, especially from a cultural perspective. The framework includes the theoretical foundation of cultural manipulation and cultural interaction, and some practical manipulative methods to guide translation practices to facilitate cultural communication. The author hopes that this study will contribute at least to some extent to the cultural communication and interaction partly through translation studies and practices.

**Index Terms**—translation studies, cultural turn, cultural manipulation, cultural interaction

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the new era, each country in the world is becoming closely connected with other countries due to an inevitable trend of globalization. The communication in politics, economy, culture, etc. among countries becomes more and more important and frequent. As we know, communication between two countries will necessarily confront difficulties or conflicts because of different cultural systems. Therefore, it is of great significance to make researches to find ways to facilitate cultural communication and improve the efficiency of communication. At the same time, intercultural communication will also contribute to the harmonious development of the diversified cultures in the world. According to the school of Translation Studies, translation studies can partly serve as such a purpose.

Translation, especially translation for cultural transmission, plays an important role in the communication of different cultures. As the scholars from the school of Translation Studies put it, the study of translation is the study of culture interaction (Zhang, 2012). Inspired by this, the author of the paper probes into Bassnett's and Lefevere's innovative thinking in translation studies, since the two scholars have conducted pioneering studies in terms of cultural interaction and constructing cultures in translation studies. This paper firstly introduces the 'cultural turn' (Bassnett & Lefevere, 2001, p.xi) in the field of translation studies, and then brings forward a theoretical framework of Bassnett's and Lefevere's cultural manipulation theory.

"It is known that Lefevere's and Bassnett's cultural manipulation theory is based on their studies of translations of literary works, and that most scholars who have conducted researches on the theory and practice of the school of Translation Studies always choose literary translation as their research objects. As many scholars argue, the theory of the school of Translation Studies has some limitations, one of which is that it is mainly concerned about literary translation" (Zhang, 2012, p.2342). As a matter of fact, there are some scholars, even though not many, who have used Bassnett's and Lefevere's theory to study non-literary translations, such as the translation of cultural-loaded tourism publicities, cultural-specific trademarks, cultural heritages, and so forth. Therefore, the author of this paper attempts to make continuing efforts to reach a breakthrough to extend the use of cultural manipulation theory beyond literary translation.

## II. BASSNETT'S AND LEFEVERE'S INNOVATIVE THINKING ON TRANSLATION

### A. Translation as Cultural Interaction

For the scholars of the school of Translation Studies, translations, rather than being a secondary and derivative genre as the traditional translation schools argue, are instead one of the primary literary tools that larger institutions – educational systems, arts councils, publishing firms, and even governments – have at their disposal to 'manipulate' a given society in order to 'construct' the kind of 'culture' desired (Bassnett & Lefevere, 2001, p.x). The task of the

translator is then less to copy an original text, but to re-create the source text in the construction of meaning and culture so as to achieve the goal of transmitting and constructing cultures, enabling different cultures to interact.

As the pioneering scholars of the school of Translation Studies, Andre Lefevere and Susan Bassnett view translation in a completely different way, the way in which to view translation studies from the perspective of the studies of interaction between cultures, stepping away from those of the traditional translation schools. They argue that cultural studies should be located into translation studies and they present a large amount of cases in their book *Constructing Cultures* (2001) for moving the field of cultural studies closer to translation studies. They redefine the object of translation studies as a verbal text within the network of literary and extra-literary signs in both the source and target cultures (Bassnett and Lefevere, 2001, p.xi). In the book *Constructing Cultures*, Bassnett and Lefevere claim that the study of translation is the study of cultural interaction (2001). They also point out in the book that translators have always provided a vital link enabling different cultures to interact.

### B. Some Essential Concepts

Bassnett and Lefevere provide several possible approaches of translation for the interaction between cultures, including constructing cultures, circulation of cultural capital, transplanting the seed and pseudo-translation, which are all concerned with rewriting or manipulation. Before probing into the practical translation procedure, the author of the paper will introduce some of these essential concepts first.

#### a. Translation, Rewriting, Manipulation

As is shown in the above discussion that, Bassnett and Lefevere disapprove the principle of equivalence or of faithfulness represented by the linguistically oriented approach and view translation as rewriting which is manipulation of the source text to some extent.

It seems that a clear understanding may be acquired of the relation between translation, rewriting and manipulation from Bassnett's and Lefevere's preface to the book entitled *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, which reads "Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulative processes of literature as exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live." (Lefevere, 2004b, p.vii)

Through the concepts of rewriting and manipulation, Bassnett and Lefevere have the purpose to assert the central function of translation as a shaping force (ibid). This means that translators, who manipulate the source text in the process of translation so as to make the translated texts function in a given culture and to enable different cultures to interact, have to make their attempts to rewrite the source text. The manipulation through rewriting the source text in the procedure of translation, on the one hand, serves the interaction between source and target cultures, as well as between translation and cultures and, on the other hand, plays a vital role in the circulation of the source language's cultures.

#### b. Cultural Capital and the Circulation of Cultural Capital

The concept of cultural capital has been first introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, by which he refers to the information "a person needs in any given cultural context to belong to the 'right circles'" (Edwin Gentzler in the foreword for *Constructing Cultures*, 2001, p.xvi). Be somewhat similar to Pierre Bourdieu's point of view, Lefevere argues that cultural capital is what makes one acceptable in one's society, and no matter what one's social status is, he is expected to participate in conversations on certain topics.

In his article entitled *Translation Practice(s) and the Circulation of Cultural Capital: Some Aeneids in English*, Lefevere (2001) claims that the object of some translations, namely translations of those texts which are recognized as belonging to the cultural capital of a given culture, is the circulation of cultural capital. The cultural capital of a given culture can be transmitted, distributed and regulated partly by means of translation, not only between cultures, but also within one given culture (Bassnett and Lefevere, 2001).

#### c. Pseudo-translation

In an article entitled "When is a Translation Not a Translation?" in *Constructing Cultures*, Susan Bassnett introduces a new concept she calls 'collusion' and argues that readers collude with what is translation, a term that distinguishes one type of textual practice from others (Bassnett and Lefevere, 2001). Then, she incorporates the term 'pseudo-translation', a term coined by Gideon Toury in *Translation, Literary Translation, and Pseudotranslation* (1985), into her discussion. In her essay, she discusses in detail several types of pseudo-translations, including the inauthentic source, self-translation, inventing a translation, travelers as translators and fictitious translation. She points out some writers create an original text and claim that it is a translation. One of the main reasons for such phenomenon is that certain cultural constraints make it impossible to write about certain topics or use certain poetic forms, or to put it in another way, cultural construction is a determinant factor in presenting and marketing a text as a translation, when it is in fact an original text (Bassnett and Lefevere, 2001).

By studying the so-called pseudotranslation, Bassnett points out that the questions such as when a translation is or is not taking place become increasingly difficult to answer, and she argues that, 'it is probably more helpful to think of

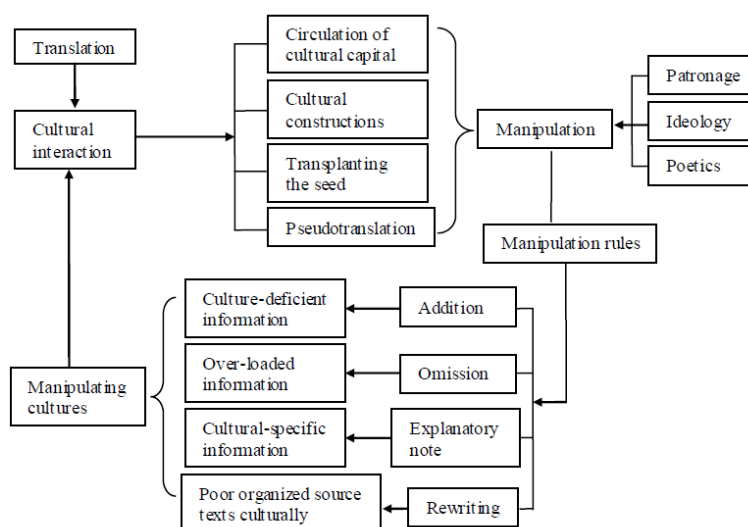
translation not so much as a category in its own right, but rather as a set of textual practices with which the writer and reader collude.’ (Bassnett and Lefevere, 2001, p.39)

After we have understood the relevant basic concepts, the author would then move on to discuss the theoretical framework in what follows.

### III. THE FRAMEWORK BASED ON BASSNETT’S AND LEFEVERE’S MANIPULATION THEORY

We have introduced the school of Translation Studies as well as the related thoughts and concepts, especially Bassnett and Lefevere’s innovative thinking on translation. Maybe we can get a clear-cut map of their theory from the following graph. This graph is drawn based upon Lefevere and Bassnett’s manipulation theory, but the author goes beyond it, trying to reinforce the edifice from without by bringing in some more building materials for use.

#### A. Translation as Cultural Interaction



We can see from the graph that, under the cultural manipulation theory, translation is a cross-cultural communicative act which enables different cultures to interact. For the school of Translation Studies, translation should not be a copy of the original, and most importantly, in addition to making the translated text understandable to the target readers, translators should seek to transfer the culture-oriented information creatively. This means that, in translating, it is of vital importance to transfer the culture-oriented information and make the translated text meaningful and functional in the target culture systems.

Therefore, to start with, translators should have a sharp awareness of the nature of translation as well as of the intended meaning and function of the original, followed by rewriting or manipulating the source text culturally.

#### B. Transferring of Cultural Capital by Manipulating the Source Text

In the collection of essays entitled ‘*Constructing Cultures*’, Bassnett and Lefevere give several illuminating examples of how translators manipulate the source text or even create a translation in different cultural contexts with the purpose of transferring or even constructing certain cultural capital of a given culture into the target language culture systems.

According to Lefevere, when a text is considered as part of the cultural capital of a given culture, or of the world culture, the object of the translation is to transfer the cultural capital. In his article *Translation Practice(s) and the Circulation of Cultural Capital: Some Aeneids in English*, Lefevere (2001) proves his point of views by analyzing some English translations of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Lefevere points out in the article that cultural capital can be distributed and regulated by means of translation, and the distribution and regulation of cultural capital depends on at least the following factors: (i) the need, or rather needs, of the audience, or rather audiences, (ii) the patron of initiator of the translation, and (iii) the relative prestige of the source and target cultures and their languages (Bassnett and Lefevere, 2001, p.44). In ‘*Constructing Cultures*’, Bassnett and Lefevere (2001) illustrate how translators or translations enable the transferring of certain cultural capital with some more typical examples, such as Lefevere’s ‘*Acculturating Bertolt Brecht*’, Bassnett’s ‘*Transplanting the Seed: Poetry and Translation*’, and Bassnett’s discussions on several types of pseudo-translations.

From their discussion it is known that for Bassnett and Lefevere the purpose of translation or, at least the translation of literary works or the culture-oriented materials, is to transfer the cultural capital of a given culture (Zhang, 2012). Translators should transmit the source language culture to the target culture systems or construct it there creatively so that the interaction between source language culture and target language culture becomes possible.

### C. *The Main Factors Affecting the Cultural Manipulation*

In his book entitled *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, Lefevere (2004b) discusses the three major factors influencing the manipulation, which are ideology, poetics and patronage. He points out that translation cannot reflect factually the image of the original mainly because it is inevitably influenced by these three factors.

Translators and translation practices are impacted consciously or subconsciously by the ideology of a certain society or culture. Under the manipulation of ideology, translators might take the strategies of adding, omission or editing during the process of translation so as to serve the political or social purpose of the society he lives in. The manipulation theory also claims that translations are laden with the influence and constraint of poetics. As Lefevere argues, the manipulation through rewriting the source text is in nature a phenomenon of cultural necessity, and translators are surely impacted by various social cultural elements. The third factor is patronage which is recognized as one of the most important manipulative factors by Lefevere. Lefevere's concept of patronage is a broad one within which kings, queens, booksellers, school systems, arts councils, governments and individuals are all implicated. Patronage is the extra-textual factor which can influence the translation from the aspects of ideology, economy and social status.

However, it is important to note that the three factors usually lie hidden behind the translation.

### D. *Some Workable Manipulation Rules*

Based on the previous studies of the translation of tourism materials from Chinese into English, the author of the paper will bring forth some manipulation rules into the framework of Bassnett's and Lefevere's manipulation theory. The techniques employed in this paper include addition, omission, use of explanatory note and rewriting (Zhang, 2012). As to these manipulation rules, further and detailed discussion will be included in the following part of the paper.

The manipulation rules are employed to achieve a common purpose, namely, demonstrating cultures and facilitating the interaction between cultures. Therefore, all the techniques applied here can be considered as having much to do with cultures being manipulated when doing translation, and we call such phenomenon cultural interaction. Thus, through the analysis we will demonstrate Bassnett's and Lefevere's core thoughts of translation which consist in a belief that translation is a cross-cultural communicative act and the study of translation is the study of cultural interaction.

## IV. REVIEW OF SOME WORKABLE MANIPULATIVE METHODS BASED ON THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this part, the author of the paper will move on to review some manipulative methods such as addition, omission, explanatory note and rewriting based on the cultural manipulation theory (Zhang, 2012) and many prestigious scholars' studies.

### A. *Addition*

We can see the clue of manipulative method of Addition from Lefevere's discussion of the different translations of the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes. He argues that the interpretations quite literally become the play for those who are unable to read the original or, in other words, that the translation projects a certain image of the play in the service of a certain ideology (Zhang, 2012). He also discusses that "This fact is most apparent in the passages various translators insert in their translations, passages that are most emphatically not in the original (Lefevere, 2004b, p.42)." From Lefevere's discussion, we may say that translators would on occasion add some extra information in their translations to present the source text or the image of the source text to the target readers. Bassnett also argues that the translator can at times "enrich or clarify the source language texts during the translation process" (Bassnett, 2004, p.36). To generalize Lefevere's expression of "insert passages in their translations" and Bassnett's "enrich or clarify the source language texts", we can use the term 'Addition' (Zhang, 2012), a manipulative method to facilitate cultural communication and cultural interaction which is also discussed a lot by many Chinese translation scholars who are enlightened by the cultural manipulation theory. Qiu argues that the manipulation theory advocated by Lefevere and some other scholars has provided a convincing justification for using the manipulative methods of which addition is one when translating the tourism materials from Chinese into English (Qiu, 2008, p.96). In a published article entitled *A Cultural Explanation during the Translation of Tourism Materials from Chinese into English*, Pan also discusses several manipulative methods of cultural explanation within which the method of addition is included. According to him, a lot of scenic spots introduced on tourism publicity sheets are related to certain historical events, heroes, legends and so forth, which are Chinese culture-specific and thus are difficult for the foreign readers to comprehend. Therefore, the technique of addition is used by translators in order to ensure the target readers a better understanding of the illocutionary meaning contained in the words, expressions and sentences of the source texts (Pan, 2007, p.82).

On the premise that, in the light of the school of Translation Studies, the study of translation is the study of cultural interaction, or put it in another way, translation is in nature cultural communication or even cultural construction to some extent, translator is not necessarily 'faithful' to the source text writer all the time in the process of translation. Translators may use the manipulative method of Addition in order to facilitate cultural interaction. That is to say, some culture-oriented information related to the source language text may be added to the target language texts for the sake of demonstrating cultural elements and enabling them to interact with foreign cultures partly through the translation (Zhang, 2012).

However, Addition is just one feasible way which can be used to manipulate the source texts for the sake of cultural interaction. On the contrary, translators may also employ the method of Omission, which will be discussed in the coming part, to demonstrate foreign cultures in a feasible and proper way.

### B. Omission

Opposite to Addition, many translators would as well use Omission as a manipulative method when translating the source text. According to Lefevere, such kind of manipulative method can be called as ‘ideological omissions’ (Lefevere, 2004b, p.64 & Zhang, 2012). In his book entitled *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, Lefevere probes into the different translations of *Anne Frank’s Diary*, in which he discusses how translators employ the translation technique of ideological omissions (Zhang, 2012). The author of the paper would like to mention that, as argued by Lefevere, translators omit passages, expressions or words of the source texts under certain constraints which include ideology, poetics and patronage. However, those constraints are hardly noticeable because they are not something floating on the surface of water, but lying behind the texts, for most of the time (ibid). Since the school of Translation Studies argues that the study of translation is the study of cultural interaction, the author of the paper would like to focus on the study of the cultural manipulation phenomena and of the cultural transmission and cultural interaction, and would not venture into the study of the factors of ideology, poetics and patronage even though this is another research direction which may breed other scholars most interests. The technique of omission in the process of translation has also been discussed a lot by many Chinese translation scholars. Qiu (2008) argues that, because of cultural differences, there might be some information in the source texts which is of little value to the target language texts. In order to deal with the meaningless or redundant information properly during the process of translation, Qiu suggests that translators should operate the source texts by means of omission (Qiu, 2008, p.97). Another scholar conducts an empirical study of the translation of School News of colleges from the perspective of ‘cultural turn’ in translation studies, which comes to the conclusion that, from the cultural perspective, translators may break the shackles of the source texts and manipulate the translation of them by omission, among other things (Guo, 2010, p.118).

In the process of translation, translators may properly use the technique of Omission. For example, He and Wang argue that Chinese tourism texts always lay stress on the social characteristics, natural features and scenery of the scenic spots, such as their social influences, historical evolvments, cultural characteristics and then some. Accordingly, the Chinese texts abound with flowers of speech, emotional words, rhythm and parallelism. Particularly, there are always some lengthy historical records, literary works or poems quoted in the tourism texts (He & Wang, 2009). In such a case, if the source text is all of it translated into English with absolute ‘faithfulness’, an overgrowth of information will result, part of which may appear redundant and unreadable, part of which may damage the demonstration of and interaction between cultures because of its distracting effects, and should be omitted in order to facilitate cultural communication and cultural interaction. Therefore, many redundant or dispensable modifiers, quoted poems, historical records and literary works are omitted in most cases in the process of translation.

### C. Explanatory Note

Another manipulative method which would presumably benefit the cultural construction and cultural interaction is “explanatory note” (Lefevere, 2004b, p.50), a term coined by Lefevere. He claims that “faithfulness” is just one translational strategy, not the only strategy possible, or even allowable, and translators will use the “explanatory note” to ensure that the reader reads the translation – interprets the text – in the “right” way. He argues that “translated texts as such can teach us much about the interaction of cultures and the manipulation of texts” (Zhang, 2012). It is notable that by “explanatory note” we mean some information contained in the target language texts, which is different from footnote (ibid).

This manipulative method can be used in the translation of culture-loaded materials. For example, in culture-loaded tourism materials, there are always some nouns, expressions, historical events or the like which is difficult for English speaking readers to understand owing to their lack of cultural or historical background knowledge. Therefore, in order to ensure that the target language readers to understand the source text and the culture-oriented information it contained in the ‘right’ way, ‘Explanatory note’ (Lefevere, 2004b, p.50) is another workable manipulative method in the process of translating culture-loaded tourism materials or other culture-specific source texts.

### D. Rewriting

Apart from the above three manipulative methods, there is another one that can be called Rewriting. According to Lefevere, he would like to term translation as rewriting which can “project the image of an author and/or a (series of) work(s) in another culture, lifting that author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin” (Lefevere, 2004b, p.9). The manipulative method of Rewriting has also been discussed much by many Chinese scholars who argue that it can be employed when translating culture-loaded tourism materials from Chinese into English to constructing Chinese cultures in foreign culture systems to realize cultural interaction, such as Chen Shaokang (2010), Qiu Hemin (2008), Pan Ningyu (2007), Han Xiaohong, to just name a few.

Through Rewriting, “some irrelevant or tenebrous information of the source texts can be weakened or even ignored during translation, while, some culture-oriented information related to the source language texts is highlighted, or at whiles, the original information is even replaced by culture-oriented information. This makes the focus of a translation

shift to demonstrating or transferring culture-oriented information from translating the source text with the principle of 'fidelity' as traditional translation theories assert" (Zhang, 2012).

## V. CONCLUSION

This paper is qualitative one which introduces the innovative thinking in translation studies argued by the school of Translation Studies, particularly Bassnett and Lefevere, the two pioneering scholars who argue that translation studies should take 'cultural turn' (Zhang, 2012). The author also generalizes their theories and has formed a theoretical framework which can be referred to when doing translation studies or practices. Besides, the author is making his effort to extend the feasibility of cultural manipulation theory beyond literary works, that is to say, cultural-loaded materials such as cultural heritages, culture-specific scenic spot and so forth. There are surely some limitations of the present study. First, the author has not probed into sample analyses, or we can say the study might be too theoretical, at least to some extent. Second, currently the theories of the school of Translation Studies are not the main stream in the field of translation studies, and partly because of the author's limited knowledge, the study might be not as profound and comprehensive as it should be.

In consideration of the limitations of the present study, the author suggests that further studies may include a much wider range of sources and a greater number of samples providing a more convincing discussion. Besides, further researches may circle around the translations of culture-loaded materials in addition to literary translations, in other words, researchers may try to employ the theories of the school of Translation Studies into the practice of various types of translations, if those translations concern cultural elements.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Baicheng, Zhang (2012). On Chinese-English Translation of Culture-loaded Tourism Publicities: A Perspective of Cultural Manipulation Theory. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 02.11, 2342-2348.
- [2] Bassnett, Susan (2004). *Translation Studies*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [3] Bassnett, Susan, & Lefevere, Andr   (eds.) (2001). *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [4] Guo Haiyan (2010). Cong wenhua zhuanxiang shijiao kan gaoxiao xiaoyuan xinwen fanyi – Yi huazhong nongye daxue yingwen wangzhan weili (A study of the translation of school news of colleges from the perspective of cultural turn - taking the English website of Huazhong Agricultural University as an example). *Hubei Hanshou Daxue Xuebao (Journal of Hubei Correspondence University)* 23.3, 117-118.
- [5] Han Xiaohong, Chen Shaokang (2010). Jin shinian xifang yilun zai Zhongguo de fazhan yanjiu zongshu (On the development of western translation theories in China in the last decade). *Zhongguo Dianli Jiaoyu (China Electric Power Education)* 161.10, 205-207.
- [6] He Jianbo, Wang Zhen. (2009). Hanying l  you wenben ziliao fanyi de chayixing lunl   (On the textural differences in the C-E translation of tourism materials). *Heilongjiang Jiaoyu Gaoxiao Yanjiu Yu Pinggu (Heilongjiang Education Higher Education Research & Appraisal)*, (06), 90-92.
- [7] Lefevere, Andr   (2004a). *Translation/History/Culture: A Sourcebook*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [8] Lefevere, Andr   (2004b). *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [9] Pan Ningyu (2007). Lun l  you ziliao fanyizhong de wenhua chanshi (A cultural explanation during the C-E translation of tourism materials). *Xibei Gongye Daxue Xuebao Shehuikexue Ban (Journal of Northwestern Polytechnical University Social Science)* 27.2, 80-84.
- [10] Qiu Hemin (2008). Caozong xuepai shijiaoxia l  you wenben hanyiying cel   tanyou (On strategies for translating Chinese tourism texts into English: a manipulative perspective). *Shaoxing Wenli Xueyuan Xuebao (Journal of Shaoxing University)* 28.2, 95-98.
- [11] Toury, Gideon. (1985). *Translation, Literary Translation, and Pseudotranslation. Comparative Criticism*. Vol. 6. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Baicheng Zhang** has got an M.A. in Foreign Language and Literature majoring in Business English Studies from Guangdong University of Foreign Studies in 2011 and received his B.A. in Economics from Southwest University for Nationalities in 2009. He is currently an instructor in the School of Foreign Languages, Wuhan Polytechnic University, Wuhan, China. His primary research interests include intercultural communication, Business English studies and translation theory and practice.